

The FIRE's continued at OXFORD:

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The Decree of the Convocation for burning the Naked Gospel, considered.

In a Letter to a Person of Honour.

Honoured Sir,

I Gave you in my last the state of the Controversy between the Bp. of *Exeter*, and the Rector and major part of the Fellows of *Exeter-Colledge at Oxford*, as well as I could collect it from the Relations I could meet with, and from their Petition to her Majesty, before whom the Cause is depending. In the meantime, the *Gazette* will inform you, The University of *Oxford*, in Convocation held, Aug. 19. instant, has past their Judgment and Decree against certain Propositions as Impious and Heretical, cited out of a certain infamous Libel—entituled, *The Naked Gospel*, which (say they) impugn and destroy the chief Mysteries of our Faith, always held and maintained in the Catholick Church, and especially in the English. And in the Preface to their Decree, they say, it not only denies, but exposes to scorn that very Lord Jesus Christ, who is God blessed for ever.

Now, Sir, before I take into consideration the impious and heretical Propositions, give me leave to give you a short Summary of the Tendency and Design of the Book,

and of the reputed Author's printing it as his own Charge, as I am inform'd by some that know him, for I do not know him my self, nor ever had any communication with him.

And first of the Author's Design in writing it. When the King had called a Convocation to reconcile (as was hoped) to the Church of *England*, the several Parties in this Kingdom, and to satisfy (if possible) the Consciences of those who differ from it, this Author was willing to contribute to so good a Work. But because a direct Address might appear too great a boldness (as some that went that way afterward found) he conceiv'd that a clear stating the first Principles of the Gospel, would appear more suitable to so learned a Body, and useful toward enlargement of the Mind to a comprehensive Charity. He therefore got this Treatise printed, with design to steal a Copy of it into the Hand of every Member of the Convocation, without publishing it to the World. No sooner was the Impression finished, but he found the Hopes of the King, and the Generality of good Men disappoint-

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ted, by the rigour of the prevailing Party in the Convocation; and a great Noise made about this well-design'd Book, whereof some few Copies had gotten abroad. The Author hereupon made some Changes in the middle of the Book, leaving out such Passages as appeared most offensive; and of this Impression he communicated more Copies than he had done of the former. But now cometh out a stolen Impression of the first Book made at *London*, by he knows not whom, which put it out of his power to dispose as he pleas'd, of a Book that was his own.

1. By Writing, and then by Printing and Altering, wholly at his own Cost. Thus it appears his Design was not to disturb the Peace of the Church, but to promote it.

2. The Design and Tendency of the Book, I will presume to whisper to you, (out of hearing of the Convocation) is such, as partly by reconciling Controversies, partly by distinguishing necessary Articles from those that are not necessary, and cutting off Disputes about the Modes and Niceties of things in gross necessary; by giving such a Scheme of Christian Religion as is clear and plain to vulgar Capacities, and apt to remove Doubts, and Fears, and Uncertainties, and to satisfy good Peoples Minds touching their being in the true way of Salvation, notwithstanding the many Differences and Disputes among conscientious Men, which they are either not able to determine, or not with full satisfaction to themselves; to turn Mens Minds from the study of Opinions, and Speculations, to Practical Piety, Devotion toward God and Christ, and Love toward all Christians of all Perswasions; in the mean time making Rents and Divisions, Hearts and Animosities about Matters hardly determinable, to be dangerous and unbecoming sincere Christians. This Book, I say, having this Design and Tendency, were not People prejudiced against it by rash and presumptuous Decrees and Censures, might be of as great benefit to the World in general, and the Christian

World in special, as perhaps any Book of that Subject that has been publish'd these hundred Years. When you have read the Book, I doubt not but you will be of my Mind. But for all that, I could have with-ed the Author had not, by some elegant Figur'd of Speech, either bordered upon Hyperbole's, or made his Mind less intelligible to common Readers, and laid himself more open to the Cavils of his fierce Enemies, (which he did not fear among so learned Men as our Convocation.)

For, except the manner of expression, I make no question but your own Memory will suggest to you, that (as we say of the Holy Scriptures, they contain in one Bundle all those excellent Precepts and Instructions, which lie dispers'd, some in one, some in another of the Philosophers) so the *Naked Gospel* contains nothing but what is found by Parcels; in other eminent and allowed Authors, whom the *Oxford* Convocation dare not pass Sentence upon, tho' they have appear'd of late Years presumptuous enough in that kind; witness their famous Judgment and Decree pass'd in Convocation, *July 21. 1683.* declaring 27 Propositions to be *Falsi, Seditious, and Impious; and most of them to be also Heretical and Blasphemous, infamous to Christian Religion, and destructive to all Government in Church and State.* And this at such a time, when the Court solicited that Judgment for promoting their horrid Design of introducing Popery and Arbitrary Government into these Kingdoms, and rooting that pestilent Heresy of Protestantism out of all Nations; to which that *Oxford*-Decree was greatly serviceable. And had the Body of the People of *England* been thoroughly perswaded of the Truth, Equity, and Religion of that Decree in all the Propositions, we could never have had the happy cause of blessing God for delivering us from French Tyranny, and Popish Cruelty and Superstition, by the glorious Courage and Conduct of his Highness the Prince of *Orange*; nor could the Peers, and Representatives of the Nation in Convention, have

have sett'd the Crown upon their most Excellent Majesties, *William and Mary*; but we had in all likelyhood been for ever enslaved to a bigotted Popish King, and the Lady of *Lewitt's* Heirs. For it is observable, that the Vote of the Convention, which declared *K. James's* Throne vacant, was grounded upon his having broken the Contract between King and People. And that there is such a Contract, is the Proposition condemned as impious by the same Hand which now condemned the *N. G.* At this time we see that those Bishops, and others, that have thoroughly digested the *Oxford-Principles* of Passive Obedience, and Non-resistance, can rather lose their Preferments, than swear Allegiance to our King and Queen. And since divers of the Clergy profess to swear to their Majesties as King and Queen *de Facto* only; Have we not reasonable grounds to suspect the Passive-Obedience-men of the Convocation to be such? And perhaps our Author may have somewhat more incur'd their Enmity by his being (as I hear he is) a *de Jure* Liege-man, and did not join his Suffrage in that Decree.

This burning Decree of the Convocation of *Oxford*, *July 21. — 83.* brings fresh to my Mind the most unjust Expulsion of *Mr. Parkinss* from that University, and consequently from his Fellowship in *Lincoln-Colledge*, whereby, and from his Pupils, he receiv'd about 120 *l. per Annum*; of all which he was depriv'd, without any Trial, about the very time of that Convocation, and for holding (as was pretended) some of those Propositions condemned by that Decree; and whilst he stood indicted for the same at the Assizes of *Oxford*, where, and at the King's-Bench *Westminster*, he was forced to give attendance for about three Years. And tho' he has been restor'd to the Liberty of the University, by the late Vice-Chancellor, now Bishop of *Bristol*; yet to this Day he cannot procure restoration to his Fellowship, much less reparation of his great Damages sustain'd in the space of full seven Years. How does *Dr. H.'s* Conscience suf-

fer him to sleep while it is not done, since he was the chief Agent in that Expulsion!

Let me enquire now how these Gentle-men-burners make good their Sentence, That the *Naked Gospel* plucks up by the Roots the *Primitive Doctrine* once disseminated to the *Salute*; destroys the chief *Mysteries* of our Religion; and not only denies, but exposes to scorn that very *Jesus Christ* our Lord, who bought us, and who is God blessed for ever. A heavy Charge indeed, and which is to be abominated by all Christians. But what shall we say of these Judges if they fail in their Proofs? must they not fall under the Character of false Accusers, and unjust Judges?

The Matters contain'd in the Book, from first to last, shew plainly, that the Author is neither *Arian* nor *Socinian*; for he is so far from denying even the Eternal Divinity of our Lord *Jesus Christ*; that he plainly enough confesses it; but if he both confesses it and denies it, he contradicts himself, and cannot be said absolutely either to confess or deny it. But that he confesses it, and denies only the necessity of understanding and believing the manner of it, appears in divers Passages, (which is one main distinction which the Learned Judges ought to have considered.) As,

1. *Chap. 5. pag. 24. 1st Edit.* The *Sanctis-sima*, absolute, implicit Belief, which is acknowledged due to God, is also due to Christ: Which could not be said by one that did not believe him an Infinite God.

Again, 2. *Chap. 6. pag. 36. Other Char-acters speak an unmeasurable Excellency: but this [the only begotten Son of God] speaks an incommunicable One.* And a few Lines after he addeth, That the Divinity of our Lord maketh the Dignity of his Person unintelligible, and for that very reason he is to be believed in with utmost confidence. P. 37.

Then consider, 3. what he affirmeth *Pag. 39.* that our Saviour in answering the Jews, who were offended at him for having styled himself the Son of God, did not upon so pressing occasion assert his right, but abating so much as exceeded their comprehension — speaks nothing

thing of what he had been from Eternity in himself, but what he was in relation to the World, and in comparison with other Messengers of God to it. — Thus did he (like Elijah) contrast himself to their Dimensions, requiring only such a measure of Faith, as was suitable to their Understandings and his own Disgrace. Here the Author, saying that our Lord did not assert his Right, must mean his Right to that Title, which the Jews accus'd him of Blasphemy for usurping, (which was, that he being a Man, made himself God) clearly supposes him to be God. And again, in saying, he spake nothing of what he was from Eternity in himself: He supposeth it was a Truth beyond controversy, that he was from Eternity; and that so much the more plainly, because it comes as part of a Discourse, which shews that our Lord did not assert his Right.

4. What the Burners produce as Heretical in evidence of their Charge, viz. That his Generation must needs be so much about our Understanding, as the Nature of God is above our own; may much more justly be produced in defence of the Author, as a proof that he believed our Lord's Divinity, than be objected as subverting the Faith of it.

Since therefore he acknowledgeth our Lord's Divinity for a Truth, as we see; the Propositions the Burners cite as denying it, must be as clear as these; or else the Author does not contradict himself, but must be reckon'd Orthodox in the Faith. For obscure Passages ought in reason to be explicated by those that are clear: And then the Burners fall short in proving their heinous Charge; and all the Fault of the Author must lie in his denying it to be a matter of necessary saving-Faith. But the great Champions of the Catholick Doctrine were generally guilty of the same Heresy. St. Hilary wrote no less than twelve Books concerning the Trinity, yet in the close of the 10th hath these words, *Non per difficultes nos Deus ad beatam vitam questionibus vocat*, &c. God doth not call us to a blessed Life by difficult Questions, nor sollicit us by a manifold kind of Disputes; the way of Eternity is plain and

easy to us; viz. To believe that God raised Jesus from the Dead, and to confess him our Lord. In which words we see, not only in the present Question concerning our Lord's Person, but in all others, how little of mere Belief is required to Salvation. Nor do we find the least Hint to the contrary in the History of those Times, wherein the Controversy raged; tho' they Persecuted one another, they did not Damn one another; they contended for their Opinions, as for great Truths, wherein our Lord's Honour was concern'd, not as for Articles of Faith, whereon the Believer's Salvation depended. St. Chrysostom says, *All Necessaries are clear and manifest*. And Nazianzen, after thirteen Years study, calls them Fools who too curiously enquire into the Incarnation of our Lord.

Yea, and those who were so eager for condemning the Naked Gospel to the Flames, cannot sure but think it more dishonourable to the Saviour of the World, to believe he will damn any Man for failing of so difficult a Truth, when he sincerely believes the clear Gospel, than any other Error concerning the Divinity of his Person can be.

A second Distinction which the Author might justly have expected from such Learned Persons, was, That the Question in debate was not concerning the Divinity, or mere Humanity of our Lord's Person, but concerning a Nicety so inconsiderable, that neither the Emperor nor a Council could find the difference between the *Nicene* and *Arian* Confession. And doubtless it must be something worse than Inadvertency that can blind any Man so far, as to disable him from discovering, that from the beginning of the 7th Chapter to the 10th, this Author speaketh only as a Commentator upon the Letter of the great Emperor *Constantine*, wherein he equally condemneth both Parties for troubling the Peace of his Empire with such a Question, wherein it was not disputed whether Christ were God or not, (for therein both sides agreed) but in what manner he was begotten, or wherein he agreed or differ'd from the Father.

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There is a Passage which I find in the last Impression, (which perhaps is not in many Hands, and little notice taken of it) in which the Author, by closing that Discourse, displayeth his meaning in it, which though it be somewhat long, I think fit to transcribe.

Page 43, 49. [AND what is all this to BELIEVING IN CHRIST? Yea, what is it to the PERSON of Christ? Had freedom from Persecution, suffered a Controversy to have sprung three or four Ages before, between some that then believed Christ to be God, and others that believed Jesus to be the Christ, but a Man born of Men, (as we heard from Justin Martyr); the importance of such a Controversy would have justified the Heat wherewith it should be persecuted. But here it was quite otherwise: The Difference at first appeared very slight, and afterward none at all: For the Confession of Arius after his condemnation was so like the Nicene, that neither the Emperor himself, nor a Council, found any defect in it. The angry Bishop indeed found a word wanting, but such a word as proved too unweildy, even for those who would not dispence with it. This word Arius omitted as no less needful than intractable: But he and his followers acknowledged Christ to be the only begotten Son of God, begotten before all Worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God: Was not this to believe in him? Is it not enough to believe, that as he created the World, so he governeth it? that as he promised everlasting Life to his Believers, so he is able to perform it? that he now seeth, and will hereafter reward every one according to his Works? Doth not this answer all the Designs of Faith, Love, Thankfulness, Obedience, &c. Can none be Believers but Metaphysicians only? Nor all they neither, but only such as fully comprehend the new-coin'd words and expressions, and can so nicely apply them to the Person of Christ, as to solve all Difficulties? The Parties themselves did not think so. The

leading Bishops, in the midst of their Heats allowed Toleration to the Dissenters, and all of both sides during the Persecution under Julian, communicated in the same Churches, and in all good Offices, both of Devotion toward God, and Charity toward each other; they mutually comforted and strengthened one another in defence of the Christian Faith: By this it appeareth, they did not judge one another to be Infidels, and consequently, that the Faith to which Eternal Life is promised, was not concern'd in the Controversy.

An Evidence concurring with greater, to prove that the Creed which weareth the Name of Athanasius, was not his Issue nor Contemporary. And where is that Church of England-Man, who doth not so distinguish the Doctrines of that Creed from its Censures, as to retain the former in their full import, but pull out the Spring of the latter, by such an Interpretation as leaves uncancell'd our Saviour's Patent of Eternal Life to whosoever believeth in him?]

These are the words of the Author, wherein he summeth up the Design of all he had said concerning Faith toward the Person of Christ, and whereby are rendred inexcusable any that charge him with Arianism, Socinianism, or any other hard Character.

No! his Heresy lay not in the Book, but the Conclusion. The Conclusion was so unlucky, as not only to contradict the Purposes, but the very Speech of those Leaders of that Convocation. In the days of Hen. 3. the Bishops moved the Temporal Lords to suke the Law of England to the Canon Law, by legitimizing Children born before Wedlock: The Temporal Lords answered, *Nolumus Leges Anglie mutari, quia huc usque usa approbata sunt.* The former half of these words, the Noble Bishop of London took for the Motto of his Standard, wherein there was neither need nor place for the later half; and it is well known, who with equal Wit, Wisdom, and Gratitude, threw it in his Face in that Convocation. Could any thing more

more provoke such a Man's spleen, than a Discourse to cross, both to the Determination and the Reason, as for this very Reason to prove a Change ought to be made, because Experience had proved those Laws unhappy in succeeding Ages, which were wisely and charitably instituted, for that Age wherein they were first established? This was an Affront never to be digested, but for its sake the whole Book must be condemned, and the Author prosecuted.

From this general Apology for the Author's Innocency, I will now proceed to take a short view of the particular Propositions, whereby the Burners prove the equity of their Sentence and Execution.

" That *Mahomet* profess'd all the Articles of the Christian Faith.

Ans. By the first step we may see whither they are going. They quote the Words of the Author, as the Devil did Scripture, by halves: Had they gone on, as a Faithful Witness should do, it must plainly appear that the Author meant not to equal *Mahomet's* Belief with the Christians, but to shew the Design and Success of his Pretences: For thus he proceeds, "*Mahomet* profess'd all the Articles of the Christian Faith, and declared himself, not an Apostate, but Reformer: pretending to purify it from the Corruption wherewith it had be'n defiled, and perfect it with Additionals; he framed such a Jargon, as appeared most serviceable to his Ends, and most suitable to his Lust. And sure their Malice must have be'n too hard for their Memory if they had forgotten what had be'n said, " That the Author of the *Alcoran* " was no other than a leud brain-sick " Scoundrel, and his Doctrines (as far as they are his) no better than extravagant " Whimfies, or leud Panders to Lust. And again, that the *Asian* Churches had their " Candlestick removed by the Sword of a " base Slave and his few Followers, and by " Doctrines weak as That Sword when first

" unsheathed, and leud as those Rogues " that managed it. But alas! this would have spoild the first most Heretical and Impious Proposition, and the Author must have scap't without that severe Character of being a Friend to *Mahomet*, and a Favourer of the *Alcoran*, which any one will think him to be with a Witness, who shall read this so *just* Decree, and never view the Book it self: Do you not blush, Sir, at the Ingenuity of that Person who drew out this abominable Proposition? And are you not almost afraid, that the Learned Condemners took it upon trust, without too laborious an Examination?

And so much for this strong, firm and laudable Foundation. Let us proceed to the rest of the Blasphemies.

" *Pres.* Whether *Mahomet* or Christian Doctors have more corrupted the Gospel, is not so plain by the Light of Scripture, as it is by that of Experience, that the later gave Occasion, Encouragement and Advantage to the former. For when by nice and hot Disputes (especially concerning the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity) the Minds of the whole People had bin long confounded, and by the then late Establishment of Image-Worship, the Scandal was increased, so that to vulgar understandings the Doctrine of the Trinity appeared no less guilty of Polytheism, than that of Image-Worship did of Idolatry——Then was there a tempting opportunity offered to the Impostor, and he laid hold on it, to set up himself for a Reformer of such Corruptions, as were both too gross to be justified, and too visible to be Denied.

Ans. The Christian Doctors had not indeed, in *Mahomet's* Time, so far corrupted the Gospel as they have done since: But their then late establishment of Image-Worship, gave such scandal to the vulgar rude *Arabians*, that the Idolatry which was visible therein, made them infer, that those who were so guilty thereof, were no less guilty

guilty of Polytheism in the Doctrine of the Trinity, which to this Day they still believe. But where doth the denial of Christ's God-head appear in all this ?

* *Cap. 7. pag. 40.* The great Question concerning the God-Head of Christ is, 1. Impertinent to our Lord's Design. 2. Fruitless to the Contemplators own purpose. 3. Dangerous.

Ans. The great Question was not concerning the Godhead of Christ, (for therein both Parties agreed) but concerning the Eternity of his Godhead. They both held he was before the World, and made the World. Judges in Criminal Matters should not corrupt the Evidence. And whatever the Author speaketh of that Question, is by way of Glorify upon the Great Constantine's Letter, never yet judged Heretical, (as I observ'd before.) Is here a Title of the Author's denying the Godhead of Christ ?

* *Cap. 8. pag. 45.* Two Evangelists trace our Lord's Genealogy ; but as they derive it not from his real, but supposed Father, so do they take two several ways, not to satisfy, but to amuse us. What is this but to admonish us against Curiosity ? The Pedigree of his Flesh might easily have bin, either cleared or unmentioned ; Had the Evangelists bin wholly silent concerning it, We had less wondered ; but that they should profess to instruct us, yet doubly disappoint us, first by deriving it from a wrong Father, and then by distracting us between two ways ; what is this but to verify the Prophet's Description, *Who shall declare his Generation ?* and what doth this so careful concealment of his Generation according to his Humane Nature signify more plainly, than a warning against searching after the Eternal Generation of his Divinity ? If it were needless (and therefore left impossible) to prove him derived from David, which was one of his most revealed Characters ; How can it be otherwise, to understand that Ge-

neration of his, which must needs be so much the more above our Understanding, as the Nature of God is above our own ?

Ans. Matter of Fact is plain : Our Bibles shew us, that the two Evangelists derive our Lord's Pedigree from his reputed Father, and that they proceed therein two several ways : The Inference is innocent, *What doth this so careful concealment of his Generation, according to his Humane Nature, signify more plainly, than a warning against searching after the eternal Generation of his Divinity — which must be so much the more above our understandings, as the Nature of God is above our own.* Here again the eternal Generation of his Divinity is plainly suppos'd, so far are they from proving the denial of it.

* *Pag. 48.* And might not a Heathen at this rate justify Polytheism, provided his Gods disagreed not amongst themselves ? The Schoolmen therefore will not stand to this State of the Question, but distinguish between *Posse*, and *Suppositum rationale* ; which yet they cannot do, as to satisfy themselves, and therefore shelter themselves in their impregnable Fort, *Mystery*, and thence thunder upon the Adversaries both of this, and of another no less beloved *Mystery* : For they make this their Cock-argument for Transubstantiation ; That since the Scripture is no less express for the One than the Other, and the Contradictions no less gross in the One than in the Other ; therefore we must embrace the One as well as the Other.

To this Objection of the *Romanists*, and to others of the *Unitarians*, we have found an Answer, That we must not infer from our Own Nature to God's ; for that Ours is finite, and God's is infinite ; Three Persons among Us are Three Men, because they agree in one Common Nature ; but the Divine Nature is not a Common One, but a Singular ; and therefore Three Persons do not make Three Gods. If you understand not this, you must not wonder,

or at least you must not Gain say it; for it is a Mystery, which Reason may not pretend to fathom.

Ans. This Censurer understood well how to stop short; for had he gone one Line further, he had discovered the Innocency of the Author's Intentions; the Words are, *Why if it be a Mystery, and must still be so, to what purpose do we enquire into it, or dispute concerning it?* which plainly shew he did not intend either to Assert or Deny either side of the Question; but set aside the whole as not to be Understood, and therefore not to be Disputed. These Words are not in the Author's Second Impression; so unwilling was he (it seems) to displease, that he was at a great charge to have these and other things left out. But how justifiable are they even in the first? for they follow *Athanasius's* way of stating the Trinity, which was, That *Pater, James and John* are not three *Minds* if they be of one *Mind*, because then they are one in the *Lord*. And doth it not thence clearly follow, that a Heathen might at the same rate justify Polytheism, provided his Gods disagreed not among themselves? But who knows not that the Schoolmen and Moderns do generally (as the Author says) reject that way of Arguing, as indeed introducing three Gods, one in *specie*, but three in number?

Page 51. Thus have we pointed (and only pointed) at some of the many intangling Questions, which puzzled, and divided the subtlest Wits of several Ages, and were at last decided by no other Evidence, but of Imperial and Papal Authority; sufficient to silence Disputes, but not to establish Truth. And who is he that is not discouraged from giving a confident Assent to what is this way obtruded upon his Belief?

Ans. This is not in the Second Impression; if it were, where is the Heresy of it? Matter of Fact appears in the Historians; and the Inference, *Who is he that is not discouraged from giving a confident assent to what is this way obtruded upon his Belief?* What confi-

sidering Man would not ask the same Question?

Cap. 9. pag. 53. 1. There is danger of Blasphemy in Examining the Silly Question (as he calls it) concerning the Eternity of the Godhead of Christ.

Ans. It's call'd a Silly Question, in following *Constantine's* Letter which calls it Silly; some of whose Words are cited immediately before—*We ought (says he) to refrain our selves from talking, lest when we cannot sufficiently explain the Question, or our Hearers cannot sufficiently understand our meaning; either way the People be driven upon a necessity of Blasphemy or Contention.*

Id. 53. This is a second Danger, That we have no firm ground to go upon.—

This is not in the Second Impression. But did not the Author give sufficient Reasons for it? viz. That all are challenged by either Party with equal assurance. *Scriptures, Antiquity, and Councils too, as the Emperors choiced to influence them.* Does not Bishop *Taylor* say as much? *Liberty of Proph.*

Page 54. The only advantage of the Catholics is long Possession, and that after Sentence—They have indeed so handled matters, as to hide much, and varnish all; yet even so we may pick out enough to justify an Appeal, by observing how that Possession was first obtained, then continued, and at last settled—The Sentence which first determined the Controversy [in the Council of Nice] was not by the merit of the Cause, but Interest of the Parties.

Ans. This also is not in the Second Impression. And why, if the Sentence which first determin'd the Controversy [in the Council of Nice] was, by the Merit of the Cause, and not by the Interest of the Parties: Why did the Catholics in after-Ages, and at this Day, impose another sense upon the Nicene Sentence, than what was manifestly their meaning? What is this, but to make a Nose of Wax of that Council, as the Papists do of Scripture?

* *Pag. 56.* This long and mischievous Controversy was at last settled by *Theodosius*; who having received his Instructions and Baptism from a Consubstantialist, required all his Subjects to conform to that Religion, which *Peter* the Prince of the Apostles from the beginning had delivered to the Romans, and which at that time *Damasus* Bishop of *Rome*, and *Peter* Bishop of *Alexandria* held; and that Church only should be esteemed Catholic which worshipped the Divine Trinity with equal Honour; and those which held the other should be called Hereticks, made Infamous, and Punished.

* This therefore we may call settling the Controversy; because thenceforth all succeeding Emperors, and Bishops wrote after this Copy, and both the Parties have ever worn these Titles, which the Emperor by his Imperial Power, as the unquestionable Fountain of Honour, was pleased to bestow upon them.—Behold now the Ground upon which one of our Fundamental Articles of Faith is built; behold the Justice of that Plea, which from such a possession would prescribe to our Belief.

Ans. This is not in the Second Impression. As it is in the First, the Historian that affirms it, is to answer for it, and not our Author. As for those words—Behold now the Ground upon which one of our Fundamental Articles of Faith is built; behold the Justice of that Plea, which from such a possession would prescribe to our Belief. I know not what that Author would say to it; but I say, that the Catholics do, by receding from the Sense of those Ages in that Article, acknowledging it to be weakly grounded.

* *Pag. 57. of the Interpolated Edition.* What more ridiculously silly than to build so weighty a Doctrine upon Implicit Faith in two Bishops, partial to their own Sees, whereof the One gave it Birth, and the Other Maintenance? and what more odious than to prosecute as Hereticks and

* Malefactors, all such as should refuse to be so grossly imposed upon?

Ans. This is plainly to be understood of the Doctrine controverted in those Times, as impos'd on us as necessary to Salvation, to be believed in a modern and unintelligible Sense, though in old equivocal Terms.

Pag. 57. of the first Edition. Certainly whosoever shall carefully observe how the now established Doctrine was from first to last advanced by gross partiality of the most guilty kind, and at last imposed by a Novice Emperor, upon Implicit Faith of two Bishops, of whose Sees, the one brought it into the World, and the other maintain'd it, and a new coin'd Tradition lately obtruded by the guiltier of those Sees, but unpleaded, because unheard of in those former, long and miserable times, which it might, and ought to have delivered from the Convulsions they suffered: Whoever, I say, shall Carefully observe this, and what what foul Tricks the Church of *Rome* used in the West, and with what ill Success in the East, whose Churches did at last more Universally embrace *Arian's* Opinion, than at first they condemned it; may be tempted to number the *Athanasians* among the Roman Doctrines, and cannot but think it fairly dealt with, if (its boasted Possession pardoned) it be left upon the same level with the *Arians*, equally unworthy not only of our Faith, but of our Study.

Ans. The same Answer I gave to the former will serve to this: Is it not equal that those Doctrines, whether *Arian* or *Athanasian*, that consist of infinite Subtilties and Niceties, which the common Christians never could nor can understand, which have been conceiv'd, brought forth and nursed in such a way of Policy, Ambition, and Persecution, as Histories inform us: Is it not equal they should be left upon the same Level, equally unworthy, not only of the Faith, but also of the Study of those that heartily believe whatsoever they find in

Holy Scriptures? plain Things in the plain Sense, and obscure Texts in the best Sense they can, in conformity to plain and clear Ones.

‘ Pag. 57. If further we consider (what the Historian expressly declareth) that at the rise of this Controversy, most of the Bishops understood not it’s meaning, we cannot think it necessary to Salvation, that every private Christian should believe that as an Article of Faith, which the best Ages of the Church thought not worth knowing — [This upon second thoughts is thus express’d in a 2d Edition. An Opinion which so many wise and good Men as lived within 300 Years after Christ, were so far from believing matter of Faith, that they did not receive it as matter of Certainty, nor perhaps of Credibility. pag. 59.]

‘ The *Athanasians* abhor Polytheism, no less than do the *Arians*. If their Positions seem to infer it, they deny the consequence; if this contradict the Rules of reasoning, they avow it; for they allow Reason no hearing in Mysteries of Faith: if this make them Hereticks, it is not in Religion, but in Logick.

‘ On the other side the *Arians* profess to believe of Christ whatever himself, or his Apostles have spoken; and where one expression in Scripture seemeth to contradict another, they take such a Course to reconcile them, as the Laws and Customs of all the World direct. It is very frequent for Rhetorick to exceed, but never to diminish the Grammatical Character of a Person, whose honour the Writer professeth to advance: and upon this account they think it more reasonable, that those Expressions which exalt our Savior’s Person to an Equality with the Father, should stoop to those which speak him inferior; than that those which speak him inferior should be strained up to those

‘ which speak him Equal. And however this is the safer Way; since it will lead us to such a Belief, as will suffice for that God, for whose sake alone Belief it self is required. pag. 59. of the *Interpolated Edition*.

‘ To this Question, Whether any promise of God does necessarily import a restitution of the same numerical matter?

‘ He answers, That the Words of St. Paul; *Thou sdest, that which thou sowest, &c.* plainly deny the Resurrection of the same numerical particles.

‘ To another Question, Whether it be more honorable to God, and more serviceable to the design of the Gospel, that we believe the Contrary?

‘ He answers, That it is the same, as to ask, Whether it be more honorable to save all his Perfections, or to rob one that we may clothe the other.

Ans. To this and the other two following Paragraphs, I answer, That they relate to the Differences of those Times, wherein the hot Bishops on both sides eagerly contended with one another, to the unspeakable Detriment of the Church, and Disturbance of the Empire: But wise and stay’d Men, such as the Emperor *Constantine*, and those Bishops that were his Counsellors, had such an esteem of those Controversies as our Author.

But, 2. as to our Times, and the Question about the *Athanasian* Creed, I see not but that they who hold it so stiffly, and persecute their Brethren on that score, have no mind to remove Occasions of Difference and Separation, but to continue them; which one may be tempted to believe they would not do, but for the sake of some secular and base Interest. See more in the Judgment of one of our most eminent Bishops summing up that Letter of *Constantine* which this Author pressed. *Infra* p. 14.

This

This Persecution of the Author of the *Naked Gospel*, and the manner of it, is so threatening, both to those of the National Church, and the Dissenters from her, that a fiercer Persecution may reasonably be expected than any we have seen in the late Reigns. The Example is clear in those that being of the Church have any thing to lose pertaining to it: And for Dissenters, the Burners, and other their Brethren, do well know that none of 'em can give assent to the *Athanasian Creed*, except some Presbyterians; and non-assent let's loose all the Penal Laws, hungry Chancellors, peevish or bigotted Justices, and rascally Informers against them. Is this the Temper that was promised? If it should come to this, How much worse would the Protestant National Church of *England* deal with her Children, than the Papal Church of *Rome*? This prohibits 'em to read the Bible, and so prevents the occasion of questioning her Doctrines: but that gives us the Scripture to read, but will persecute us if we believe not, and profess more than, or contrary to what is therein contain'd; contrary to the common Principle of Protestants, and most expressly of this Church her self in her Sixth Article, which saith, 'The Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor can be proved thereby, is not to be required of any one to be believed as an Article of Faith, or of necessity to Salvation. If they do not mean by [*proved thereby*] proved to the satisfaction of every sober Man, the Church of *Rome* will prove all her Articles in the same way and manner.

Thus, Sir, I take the freedom of telling you my thoughts upon this occasion; but now I must return and ask you, whether the Learned Assembly of Burners have proved that the *Naked Gospel* does not only deny the Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ, but *ostentat habet* (as their Phrase is) expose him to scorn, or make a shew of him?

Do all their Exscriptions prove any part of their horrid Charge?

As for his denying the resurrection of the same numerical Particles, you know, that since the newer Philosophy got Credit, that Doctrine is often taught in our Pulpits, and I am inform'd even at *St Mary's* in *Oxford* too, besides in divers learned Mens Writings. Good God! when shall the Spirit of Persecution be cast out! when will Christians learn to be just as Men, not to say loving and tender-hearted as Brethren! They boast of the truth of their Faith, but it is not such as worketh by Love. What is it to honour Christ in their Words, and dishonour him in their Lives? Fourteen Hundred Years experience has taught the World, that Men contend for Opinions and Speculations in Religion, for the gratification of their Pride, Covetousness, Revenge, and the like worldly Interests.

Though my Letter has been so long, I'll venture still to entertain you, Sir, with something considerable about Dr. *Bury*, the supposed Author of the *Naked Gospel*, of which I am credibly inform'd. To have a Book condemn'd long after 'twas printed, nay, when its Author and his Colledg were struggling against heavy Oppression in their Rights and Priviledges, will put the World upon enquiring into the Reasons and Motives of such an Action, as well as the Life and Conduct of the Author. The Rector of *Exeter Colledg* then (having done what lay in his Power for his King) was expell'd from his Fellowship, for refusing to submit to the Visitors in 1648, and the only Person who had courage to read the Prayers of his then distress'd Mother the Church of *England* in the Colledg, when *extempore* Ones were in fashion; for which he was led, by a File of Musqueteers, to the next Port, turn'd out, and forbid entrance again upon pain of Death; and he never after ran counter to so good a beginning. Would not one think, Sir, this sufficient to procure him the respect and veneration of those

who are his worst Enemies? Had any of them fallen into Circumstances less troublesome, what out-cries, I fancy, would there have been! what writing of Letters! what trumpeting of Praises! what noise of Loyalty and past Sufferings! not a Figure in Rhetorick but must have been drawn dry by one Wit or other; and had that fail'd, the World must have been hector'd into a good Opinion. After he was made Rector, he never did any thing that look'd as if he had forgot his first Loyal Principles, but led a quiet, sober, and unblameable Life; given very much to good Works, as may be prov'd by his Buildings in the Colledg; his large Contributions to the Company for Relief of Clergy-mens Widows and Orphan; besides other less visible Instances, not fit to be mentioned while he's alive: All which none indeed can deny that will not basely wrong him. He was so strict an observer of what he thought the Will of his Founder, that he would have declar'd his own Son's Fellowship void, (staying some time longer beyond Sea than his Father thought allowable) if not prevented by the Fellows of his Colledg. He wrote a Book call'd *The Constant Communicant*, dedicated to, and approv'd of by his Grace the present Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury*, wherein he pleads the Authority of the Church as an Obligation so to be. Thus far he's come, without the least suspicion of want of Zeal for the Church, or of Heresy.

But we won't secure him for the future; for the last Publick Act that was at *Oxford*, he expelled one of the *Terra Filius's* for being very abusive to Dr. *Wallis*, and refusing to desist when commanded. This mightily displeas'd the Junior Masters, and he now finds they have not forgot him. In *October* last he joins with the Senior Fellows to expel another of their Degree, (Mr. *Colmer*) Fellow of his own Colledg, for Fornication; which though it has occasion'd him and his Colledg all their Troubles, yet let us by no means say it made the *Naked Gospel* Heretical and Impious. But

pursue Matter of Fact about the Manner of the Decree. After the Bishop of *E.* had visited *E. Colledg*, contrary to their Statutes and Protestation, the major part of the Fellows suspended for not betraying their Privileges: One of them Excommunicated for the heinous Crime of reading Prayers after that Suspension; the Rector himself expell'd for Contumacy, &c. and excommunicated for not yielding up his Lodgings (as you have been informed.) While they were seeking redress from her Majesty and Privy Council, a Petition against the *Naked Gospel* subscrib'd by Thirty or Forty of the Masters, was publicly and rudely presented to Dr. *M. Pro-Vice-Chancellor*, to be read in Congregation: but he refused, and gave it to the Vice-chancellor. Now, pray, Sir, please to observe, that this was an irregular way of proceeding; for the Vice-Chancellor only ought to take notice of Matters of that Nature, and Petitions are not to be tendred by great Numbers. However he gave way so far, as to call a meeting of the Heads of Houses, where the Business met with some opposition, it being freely said, that it was not fit they should be made Tools for the Bishop of *E.* or some such thing; yet 'twas then referr'd to the two Professors, Dr. *Jen* (who drew up the famous Decree of 1683) and Dr. *Hall*, barely to draw Propositions out of the Book: the latter declin'd it, and the former is said to have done it as in the Decree. In the mean time her Majesty in Council is most graciously pleas'd to order the Lord Bishop of *Exeter* should put in an Answer to the Rector and Fellows Petition, and to declare a Day should be appointed for hearing. May we not think this hasten'd the Decree?—But now the Masters seeing nothing done upon the former Petition, lay hold of a time when a Convocation was call'd, upon another Occasion, to deliver another Petition, in a yet more tumultuous manner, and with many more Hands, to the Vice-Chancellor as he came out; who took it amiss, and reprov'd them,

them, saying, *He did not like that way of proceeding*; yet it came at last to what the World sees. I shan't tell you, Sir, what manner of Men promoted it, you easily by this time guess; and though the University seem to be very sensible of the Figure they make in the World, and the Deference paid their Opinion: yet knowing that one of the Professors refus'd to be engag'd, and hearing that several Heads of Houses, and others were absent when the Decree pass'd; considering also the Time and Manner of it, and the ill Fate of the now exploded Decree in 1683, That the *N. G.* (supposing Dr. B. the Author) ought not to prejudice him in his just Rights, (which seems chiefly design'd) and especially his Colledg, who are nothing concern'd; that it's now no Secret who are the Engines and Movers of all this, that his worst Enemies live not far from a place where the Prayer has not been used for his Majesties success in *Ireland*, (but just on Fast-days when it can't be help'd) no, nor that in time of War and Tumults; that considering the Time when some things happen'd, one may wish there was not some further use intended to be made of them, than the ruining a Rector, and major part of a Colledg; (who are notoriously known to be as firm and hearty for the present Government as any in the three Kingdoms); that the University are not the proper Judges of Heresy; that they have no Statute (as I can hear of) for burning of Books; That the Author is abus'd in the Quotations; that he's only guilty of a large, generous, and extensive Charity, neither *Socinian* nor *Arian*.

And last of all, considering that several Persons, of a Character above any of the worthy Condemners, and no ways inferior to the best of them (if not exceeding) in Learning and Wisdom, have declared, that upon reading the Book they could not see any Heresy in it: I say, Sir, when one seriously reflects, and without prejudice, on all these things, one may very well afford

to wish the Decree just as much Success, as its Authors have shewn Justice.

And here it may not be amiss, Sir, to oblige you with what hath been said by an excellent Prelate of our own Church; who has also summ'd up that celebrated *Epistle of the Great and Wise Constantine*: which will be so entire a Vindication of the Author of the *Naked Gospel*, that nothing can be so much as whisper'd against him; and which Persons of free and generous Minds may be apt to oppose to the Sentiments of the University however considerable. 'There are some wise Persons (says this great Man, speaking of the first Council of Nice) that think the Church had been more happy, if she had not been in some sense constrain'd to alter the Simplicity of her Faith, and make it more curious and *artificial*, so much that he had need be a *subtle Man to understand the words of the New Determinations.* (And a little after.) Now then they that liv'd in that Age, that understood the Men, - that saw how quiet the Church was before this stir, how miserably rent now; *what little benefit from the Question, what Schism about it, gave other Censures of the Business than we since have done, who only look on the Article as determin'd with Truth and Approbation of the Church generally since that Time.* *Socrat. lib. 1. c. 2.* But the *Epistle of Constantine to Alexander and Arius, tells the Truth, and chides them both for commencing the Question, Alexander for broaching it, Arius for taking it up; and although this be true that it had been better for the Church it never had begun; yet bring began, What is to be done in it?* Of this also in that admirable *Epistle, we have the Emperor's Judgment, (I suppose not without the advice and privy of Hosius Bishop of Corduba, whom the Emperor lov'd and trusted much, and employ'd in the delivery of the Letters).*

4 First he calls it a certain vain piece of a
 Question, ill begun, and more unadvisedly pub-
 lished; a Question which no Law, nor Eccle-
 siastical Canon defineth; a fruitless Contenti-
 on, the product of idle Brains, a Matter so
 nice, so obscure, so intricate, that it was
 neither to be explicated by the Clergy, nor
 understood by the People. A Dispute of
 words, a Doctrine inexplicable, but most
 dangerous when taught; lest it introduce
 Discord or Blasphemy: And therefore the
 Objecter was rash, and the Answerer
 unadvised; for it concerned not the Sub-
 stance of Faith, or the Worship of God,
 or any chief Command of Scripture; and
 therefore why should it be the Matter of Dis-
 cord? For though the Matter be grave, yet
 because neither Necessary nor Explicable, the
 Contention is trifling and toyish: and there-
 fore as the Philosophers of the same Skill, though
 differing in the Explication of an Opinion, have
 yet more love for the Unity of the Profession, than
 disagreement for the difference of Opinion. So
 should Christians, believing in the same God,
 retaining the same Faith, having the same
 Hopes, opposed by the same Enemies, not fall at
 variance upon such Disputes; considering our
 Understandings are not all alike; and
 therefore neither can our Opinions in such
 mysterious Articles. So that the Matter
 being of no great Importance, but vain,
 and a Toy is respect of the excellent blef-
 sings of Peace and Charity, it were good
 that Alexander and Arius should leave con-
 tending, keep their Opinions to themselves, ask

each other forgiveness, and give mutual To-
 leration.

This is the substance of Constantine's
 Letter, and it contains in it much Reason,
 if he did not undervalue the Question;
 but it seems it was not then thought a
 Question of Faith, but of Nicety of Dispute:
 They both did believe one God, and the
 Holy Trinity, &c. But for the Article it
 self, the Letter declares what Opinion he
 had of that; and this Letter was by
 Socrates called, A Wonderful Exhortation,
 full of Grace and sober Counsels; and such
 as Hovins himself who was the Messenger,
 pressed with all earnestness, with all the
 Skill and Authority he had. Thus far that
 Great and Learned Bishop, Lib. Prophet.
 Stit. 2.

And now let all those who are
 discreet and reasonable, condemn
 that truly great Emperor, our own
 Worthy Prelate, and the ingenuous
 and charitable Author of the Naked
 Gospel.

I am afraid I have drawn out this Account
 to a greater length than that the reading of
 it may suit your little Leisure, but I doubt
 not your Pardon to,

Aug. 30.
 1690.

S R

Your—

A D V E R.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Reader is desired to take notice, that if the Sayings of the Fathers, and other eminent Persons, were to be quoted for that purpose, for which some of them are already mention'd, they alone would fill a Volume, and perhaps as useful an One as any yet extant: But we shall only trouble him with one very remarkable saying of Tertullian, *Lib. de Voland. Virg.*

‘ *Regula quidem fidei, &c.* This Symbol (speaking of the Apostles Creed) is the One Sufficient, Unalterable and Unchangeable Rule of Faith, that admits no Encrease or Decrease; but if the Integrity and Unity of this be preserv'd, in all other things Men

‘ ledg and Prophefying, according as they are assisted by the Grace of God.

And with one Passage out of the *Naked Gospel*, first Edition, pag. 73. line 23. ‘ The Author of the Gospel is a Person, not only Great, but Infinite; and no less so in Power than Faithfulness, so that there is no place for mistrust. Though this has not been mention'd in the Letter, yet is it as plain as can be possible, and may be found in all the Editions of the Book, and which ought sure to be acknowledged by the Judicious, Impartial, and Learned Condemners.

Farewel.

FINIS.